**All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Nerd**

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While ''America Needs Its Nerds'' (Op-Ed, Jan. 11) by Leonid Fridman, a Harvard student, may be correct in its message that Americans should treat intellectualism with greater respect, his identification of the ''nerd'' as guardian of this intellectual tradition is misguided.

Mr. Fridman maintains that anti-intellectualism runs rampant across this country, even at the ''prestigious academic institution'' he attends. However, he confuses a distaste for narrow-mindedness with anti-intellectualism. Just as Harvard, as a whole, reflects diversity in the racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds of its students, each student should reflect a diversity of interest as well.http://nytimes.perfectmarket.com/pm/images/pixel.gif

A ''nerd'' or ''geek'' is distinguished by a lack of diverse interests, rather than by a presence of intellectualism. Thus, a nerd or geek is not, as Mr. Fridman states, a student ''for whom pursuing knowledge is the top priority'' but a student for whom pursuing knowledge is the sole objective. A nerd becomes socially maladjusted because he doesn't participate in social activities or even intellectual activities involving other people. As a result, a nerd is less the intellectual champion of Mr. Fridman's descriptions than a person whose intelligence is not focused and enhanced by contact with fellow students. Constant study renders such social learning impossible.

For a large majority at Harvard, academic pursuit is the highest goal; a limited number, however, refuse to partake in activities other than study. Only these select few are the targets of the geek label. Continuous study, like any other obsession, is not a habit to be lauded. Every student, no matter how ''intellectually curious,'' ought to take a little time to pursue social knowledge through activities other than study.

Mr. Fridman's analysis demonstrates further flaws in his reference to Japan. He comments that ''in East Asia, a kid who studies hard is lauded and held up as an example to other students,'' while in the United States he or she is ostracized. This is an unfair comparison because Mr. Fridman's first reference is to how the East Asian child is viewed by teachers, while his second reference is to how the American child is viewed by fellow students. Mr. Fridman is equating two distinct perspectives on the student to substantiate a broad generalization on which he has no factual data.

Nerdism may also be criticized because it often leads to the pursuit of knowledge not for its own sake, but for the sake of grades. Nerds are well versed in the type of intellectual trivia that may help in obtaining A's, but has little or no relevance to the real world. A true definition of intellectualism ought to include social knowledge.

While we in no way condone the terms ''nerds'' and ''geeks'' as insults, we also cannot condone the isolationist intellectualism Mr. Fridman advocates.

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